The golden age of Italian renaissance diplomacy ended in 1494 with the French invasion of Italy. But, as we will see in subsequent webinars, renaissance diplomacy techniques and approaches had already started spreading beyond the Alps, throughout Europe.

The main theme of today’s webinar (28 June 2013) is the 19th century golden age of both diplomacy, and communication technology. But before we address it, we will make a brief survey of the main developments in the intermediate period between the end of renaissance diplomacy (early 16th century) and the start of the golden age of diplomacy and technology (early 18th century).

This intermediate period was characterized by a fight for dominance among the new powers of France, England and the Hapsburg Empire (Austria and Spain).

The inability of the Catholic Church to carry out its own reform, created fertile ground for the protestant reformation. The first dent was made in papal power in 1534, when the English King Henry VIII established a separate Anglican Church, after the Catholic Church opposed his divorce from Catherine of Aragon. A much broader movement started in Germany with Martin Luther, who gained support from many aristocrats and rulers, especially in Northern Europe. This schism led to the Thirty Year's War (1618-1848), and the subsequent peace treaties of Münster and Osnabrück in 1648, which established the frequently-quoted Westphalia State System, named after the province in which these two towns were located.

We will discuss the period between the early 16th and early 19th centuries by taking a look at two remarkable personalities who made a long-lasting impact on diplomacy: Hugo Grotius and Cardinal Richelieu, and the Peace of Westphalia, frequently referred to today.
By the 15th century, the Christian Commonwealth had disappeared. Without the key roles of the Roman Catholic Pope and the Holy Roman Emperor as the ultimate arbiters in international conflicts, there were conceptual gaps in international affairs.

Dutch philosopher Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), was the first to offer a comprehensive concept to fill these gaps. He introduced the schools of natural law and international law. According to Grotius, we – as individuals - have natural rights in order to protect ourselves. We are entitled to these natural rights as human beings. Through natural law, Grotius tried to establish a minimum moral consensus that could help society build itself, and overcome the divisions of the escalating religious conflicts. Grotius started building his construction with the notion that individual people, empowered by natural rights, are sovereign. Sovereign people create sovereign nations. On this foundation, he built the first theory of international law in his work ‘On the law of war and peace,’ (1625) starting form the assumption that nations – like individuals – are bound by natural law. Grotius’s teachings influenced the construction of the Peace of Westphalia.
Cardinal Richelieu was another person whose legacy remains until today. His work is the main conceptual bridge between renaissance and modern diplomacy.

Harold Nicholson highlighted the following main contributions of Richelieu to the evolution of diplomacy, which are still relevant today:

- Diplomacy as a continuous process and permanent activity. The idea of the permanence of diplomacy started developing in renaissance diplomacy with permanent ambassadors. It took full form in the time of Richelieu. Institutionally, on 11 March 1626 Richelieu established the first Ministry of Foreign Affairs in, more-or-less, the same format we know today.

- Closely linked to the principle of permanency, is the principle of certainty. Sound diplomacy should develop certainty. For example, Richelieu strongly argued that once a treaty is negotiated and ratified, it must be observed ‘with religious scruple’.

- Diplomacy should be governed by raison d’être. Interests of state are primary and eternal. They are above sentiments, prejudice and ideologies.

Richelieu was the main architect of the expansion of French diplomacy. As one of the consequences, by the 18th century, the French language had became the lingua franca of diplomacy, and has remained so until now, when it is being increasingly surpassed by English.
‘Westphalia’ is probably one of the most frequently used historical references in modern international relations and politics. The reason is that the Peace of Westphalia established the sovereignty of nation States as independent political units. The system based on nation States replaced the previous one based on the ultimate sovereignty of the Roman Catholic Pope and the Holy Roman Empire.

‘Westphalia’ was a watershed event marking the beginning of the modern era with nation states which has lasted until today.

The Westphalia peace negotiations began after all sides in the war were exhausted by 30 years of fighting and destruction. Ultimately, they reached a compromise which did not satisfy anyone (basis for a good compromise). The peace deal was the result of very long negotiations, that lasted 5 years. The first 6 months were dedicated to agreeing on the question of precedence, which was highly controversial, due to the participation of 200 rulers, and more than 1000 diplomats.

Slow communication contributed to the prolongation of the negotiation process.

It is interesting to note that the negotiators of the Peace of Westphalia did not realise that they were writing history which would have an impact far beyond their time. They were just trying to get some breathing space after a war that had gone on for 30 years. Most of the negotiators saw the peace as a pause to re-group for the continuation of the war. The long-lasting arrangement came as a result of compromise, not as a carefully thought-out political strategy, which it may look like today, when it is studied by students of international relations.
French Revolution
(1789)

Napoleonic wars
(1803 – 1815)
The key development in this period was the introduction of the telegraph, which, for the first time in human history, effectively detached communication from transportation. Until the invention of the telegraph, the speed and reliability of communication depended on various transportation means available at the time: e.g. foot messenger, horseman, and ship to name but a few.

A wide variety of terms have been used for the telegraph. Arguments over which impact of the telegraph on society was predominant, the spatial or the temporal, influenced the naming of the device. Initially, the inventor of the first telegraph, Chapel, wanted to name his new invention the “tachygraph,” highlighting the temporal aspect of communication, the speed of delivery of messages. However, the spatial aspect and the name “telegraph” prevailed. In historical writings the terms “semaphore” and “mechanical telegraph” are used interchangeably. In referring to this device I will honour the original name given by Chappel (“telegraph”) but will add the adjective “mechanical” in front of it to distinguish it from the “electric telegraph,” which was invented later on.

1 Prior to the invention of the telegraph, any message, including diplomatic dispatch, had to travel from one capital to another by carriages. For example, in the sixteenth century, a diplomatic courier would travel an average of eleven days in the summer and seventeen in the winter from Madrid to Paris... The journey from Vienna to Moscow took Herberstei not far short of four months. Quoted from: M.S. Anderson, The Rise of Modern Diplomacy, 1450-1919, London: Longman, 1993, p. 37.
2 There were a few primitive communication options which did not depend directly on transport means including smoke signals, fire beacons, and signalling by mirrors. Carrier pigeons were also a “communication means” not directly linked to transportation means, mainly the carrying of people as messengers.
3 All of the names for telecommunication devices originate from Ancient Greek, mainly as the result of the influence of Ancient Greece on the Renaissance and the development of science, e.g., telegraph (tele means “at a distance,” graphos means “writer”); semaphor (sema means “sign” or “symbol,” phoros means “carrier”).
Summary of the webinar: ‘Golden age of diplomacy and technology’ by Jovan Kurbalija

Vienna Congress 1814-1815

Prince de Talleyrand

Klemens von Metternich
The first mechanical telegraph was invented in 1794 in France by Claude Chappel. Soon after the invention of the first mechanical telegraph (aka: the semaphore) in France, it started being used for military purposes. The turbulent historical period of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars (from the end of the eighteenth century to the beginning of the nineteenth century) made investment in communication a priority. In spite of the many changes in the French political landscape, the development of a telegraph network remained a high priority for all rulers. In 1844, France had some 3000 miles of semaphore communication lines, used mainly by the military. The only civilian use of the telegraph was the reporting of the numbers of the national lottery, which, coincidentally, was also a good source of revenue for the running of the telegraph system.

It is interesting to draw a historical analogy between Chappel’s semaphores and Minitel, an early French version of the Internet. Both inventions were ahead of their time and subsequently replaced by the electronic telegraph (in the case of semaphores) and the Internet (in the case of Minitel). In both cases, an early start caused the delayed adoption of newer technologies (the electric telegraph and the Internet).

Other countries also developed mechanical telegraph systems, again, mainly for military use. The selection of lines was usually of strategic relevance. In Britain, the telegraph system linked London and the main ports (from 1796-1808), reflecting the importance of the British Admiralty and Navy. In Prussia, a semaphore system was developed in 1832, linking Berlin (Eastern Prussia) and Coblenz (the Rhineland), in order to highlight the need for unification, which...
followed a few decades later under the rule of Bismarck. With the introduction of a semaphore line between St. Petersburg and Warsaw in 1839, Russia aimed to consolidate its annexation of Poland.

The main aim of establishing semaphore lines in Spain (1845) and Sweden (1832) was the consolidation of the unity of the two nation states. After the French Revolution, it became obvious that the telegraph and an integrated communication system were important tools in building national unity. The telegraph played a similar role in the United States.\(^5\)

\(^5\) In 1860, the US Congress passed a bill facilitating electronic telegraph links between the Pacific and the Atlantic parts of the United States.
The invention of the electric telegraph was more a process than a moment of creative illumination. Here is how the English historian, Robert Sabine, described this process: “The electric telegraph did not, strictly speaking, have an inventor. It grew little by little towards perfection, with each inventor adding his bit.” One of the reasons for such group work on the electric telegraph was the introduction of scientific societies and journals, which led to the faster dissemination of scientific and technical knowledge.

The functional principle of transmitting a message over distance was introduced by the semaphore, the “mechanical” telegraph. Electric batteries, invented by Italian Volta in 1800, were an important pre-invention, facilitating the development of the electric telegraph. As part of these collective but very often uncoordinated efforts, the German physicist, Soemmering, experimented with electrochemical reactions and some proto-versions of the telegraph. With a theoretical breakthrough in the field of electromagnetism in 1820, Ampere conceptualised a needle-telegraph device.

An important step in the process of the invention of the electric telegraph was the work of the Russian diplomat Baron Pavel Shilling. During his posting in Germany, Baron Shilling developed an electric telegraph, which was displayed for the first time in Bonn in 1835. His invention was successfully tested in St. Petersburg, where Baron Shilling connected a number of buildings of the

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7 The two main centres for the exchange of scientific knowledge were the Royal Society in Great Britain and the Académie des Sciences in France.
Russian Chief Admiralty. Plans to connect St. Petersburg with the naval base at Kronstand were scuppered by his death in 1837.

One year later in 1838, the history of the telegraph moved from the “diplomatic” to the commercial phase. In Britain, Cooke and Wheatstone responded to the demands of the railway owners to establish more efficient communication among the growing network of railway lines. The railway needed more efficient communication for various reasons, the main one being that all trains used the same railway lines. Thus, the exact location of each train was of the utmost importance for the normal functioning of the system.
1850s Morse – the first telegraph line Washington-Baltimore to use Morse Code;

1859-1866 Various attempts to lay a trans-Atlantic cable, resulting in the establishment of a fully reliable link in 1866; telegraph cables and the purchase of Alaska.

The railway was also the main driving force in the development of the telegraph network in the United States. The key person there, incidentally, incorrectly credited as the inventor of the telegraph, was Samuel Morse. Besides setting the first telegraph line between Washington and Baltimore, Morse’s main contribution to telegraphy was the invention of a special code, named Morse Code after him, for communication over telegraph lines.

The next important step in the development of telegraphy was the laying of the trans-Atlantic cable. Although Queen Victoria and US President Buchanan managed to exchange messages in 1859, the cable stopped functioning a few months later after only 732 messages were sent. It required another two attempts for the cable to become fully functional in 1866. One of the reasons for this delay was the American Civil War (1861-1865).

Unsuccessful attempts to establish a trans-Atlantic link are often cited as one of the reasons for the US decision to purchase Russian America (Alaska). Faced with difficulties in establishing a trans-Atlantic link, Western Union president Hiram Sibley urged the purchase of Alaska in order to establish a 16,000 mile land-based wire between the USA and Europe through western Canada, Russian America, across the Bering Strait and through Siberia. This terrestrial telegraph scheme was abandoned in 1868 when the trans-Atlantic cable proved to be a success. Alaska, though, has remained a part of the United States.

The growth of the telegraphy infrastructure and telegraphic transmission occurred very rapidly. ITU statistics show that in 1868, 29 million messages were sent; this increased to 121 million in 1880 and to 329 million at the end of century. During that period, international flow represented only 20 percent of total communication.⁸

⁸ Armand Mattelard, Mapping World Communication (War, Progress, Culture), translated from the French by Susan Emmanuel and James A. Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Pres, 1994), p. 11.
The impact of the telegraph on society was considerable and very dispersed. Like other communication technologies, the telegraph had a considerable impact on the spatial and temporal aspects of human society. Yet, it did not “annihilate” space and time as was stated at the time.9

The impact on the temporal aspects of the organisation of human society was considerable, as set out by Stephen Kern in his book *The Culture of Time and Space: 1880–1914*. The telegraph introduced faster communication. This led towards a general change in the perception of time, including the way in which human beings organised personal and institutional time (e.g. working hours).

The impact on the relationships between different nations and cultures was immediate, as was clearly indicated by the statement of anti-slavery activists in the mid-nineteenth century: “We can no longer ignore what is going on in America—it is only two weeks away.”10

The initial and most important use of the telegraph was in railway transport. Telegraphy then spread quickly to other commercial activities, including the support of trade and financial transactions. The telegraph led to a dynamic “internationalisation” of economic activities, which resulted in many developments, including transnational corporations and global markets. For example, after the introduction of the telegraphic trans-Atlantic cable in 1866,

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the New York and London stock exchanges became linked and frequently exchanged information. This enormously boosted economic activities.

The telegraph became one of the main investment areas. The amount of private investment in the development of the telegraph, mainly the transatlantic cable, added to almost $12 million. The scale of this investment can best be illustrated by the fact that the total US military budget in 1860 was $15 million and that Alaska was purchased from Russia in 1867 for $7.2 million.
Electric Telegraph & The Emancipation of Women

- The emancipation of women;
- Women were often employed as telegraph operators (secure jobs, greater rights, possibility of education,…).

A supervisor in a telegraph exchange office measuring the length of skirt of a female employee.

Jovan Kurbalija - A Historical Analysis of the Interplay between Technology and Diplomacy
Like all technologies, the telegraph affected the distribution of power and led to winners and losers. One historically telling story involves the effect the introduction of the telegraph had on the communication advantage of the big banking family, Rothschild. Prior to the introduction of the telegraph, Rothschild had a well developed communication system, connecting the main European economic centres, based on couriers and carrier pigeons. It provided Rothschild with a competitive advantage, which disappeared with the introduction of the telegraph.

It is no surprise that Jomaes de Rothschild became a technophobe and nostalgic for pre-telegraph days: “it was a crying shame that the telegraph has been established.”11 If we replace the word “telegraph” with the word “Internet” his following statement would sound very contemporary: “The telegraph meant that even when he went to take the waters for his summer holiday there was no respite from the business: ‘One has too much to think about when bathing, which is not good.”12

One of the telegraph’s unforeseen consequences is the impact it had on the emancipation of women. Women were often employed as telegraph operators. With secure jobs, greater rights and possibility of education, in the industrialised countries women started getting more important positions.

Some rulers were wary of the potential social impact of the telegraph. For example, Russian Tsar Nicolas I considered the telegraph to be “subversive.” Afraid of its democratising potential to disseminate information, he declined an offer by Morse to develop the country’s first telegraph lines. As a result, Russia lagged greatly behind the other major powers and during World War I this proved disastrous, when Russian telegraph lines were too poor to accommodate the communication needs of the Russian army.

12 Ibid, p. 65.
The control of telegraph cables became of crucial geo-strategic importance.

**The British Monopoly and How It Was Challenged**

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The history of telegraph cable geo-strategy reflected, to a large extent, the complex geo-strategy of the European balance of power system. For example, the British cable system followed the Rimland line of Machan/Macinder (Gibraltar-Malta-Suez-Aden-India). Other players, mainly Germany, tried to

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Footnote 13: The term “Cable Geo-strategy” is used because of the key importance of cables for telegraph communication and the overall telegraph network.
extend the Hartland. The Berlin-Baghdad railway was one attempt in this direction. New railway lines were quickly followed by new telegraph cables.

Britain’s primary goal of protecting Rimland was also obvious in its blocking of German plans to establish a telegraph cable between Basra (the Persian Gulf) and Goa (India). Although the refusal for landing rights for the cable officially came from the Ottoman Empire (Basra) and Portugal (Goa), the main opponent of such plans was actually Britain, which had strong influence on both the Ottoman Empire and Portugal. Ultimately, in 1913, Germany approached the real decision-maker, British Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey, who refused the request for support of the Indian cable: “Germany has no great commercial need for such a cable… and he is accordingly led to the conclusion that the object of their request is political.”

A similar situation existed in the colonial fight for supremacy, where the laying of cables followed colonial divisions and zones of influence. This was particularly noticeable in the relations between the British and the French colonial empires.

However, “cable geo-strategy” was very often more complex than, and sometimes contradictory to, real geo-strategy. Firstly, the laying of cable was very often both a commercial and geo-strategic decision. In many cases, private companies developed this infrastructure drawn by commercial interests. Whenever possible, they would seek state support. This was especially so in the case of France and Germany, which tried to close the “cable gap” to Britain through heavy state financing. Secondly, “cable geo-strategy” could not follow the frequent changes between 1880 and 1914 in real geo-strategy and in European alliances.

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Great Britain was the first country to notice this and moved very early and quickly in wiring the world with telegraph cables. Towards the end of the century, Great Britain controlled most of the global telegraph network. A number of reasons led towards Great Britain’s dominant position:

- it started laying sub-marine cables in order to facilitate communication with its remote colonies, mainly India;
- its control of the seas helped Britain to lay sub-marine telegraph cables without any major obstacle;
- the high cost of developing and maintaining its telegraph network was partly compensated with commercial traffic, since the main strategic telegraph outposts coincided with the main trade routes (Gibraltar, Malta, Cyprus, Alexandria, Aden, Singapore, Hong Kong, etc.).

With its dominant telegraph network, Great Britain was well set for the forthcoming international crises, which started on the cusp of two centuries. The level of British dominance can be illustrated by the fact that other countries had to use British networks for their official and diplomatic communications.

Other countries realised relatively late both the importance of having a telegraph network and the extent of the British dominance. Although France pioneered the development of the telegraph (Chappel’s “mechanical telegraph”), it was a late-comer in the development of a global telegraph cable network. It was only after a series of crises (Tonkin, Siam, and Fashoda) that the French parliament started to take the problem of the lack of its own telegraph network and British dominance in this field seriously.
Germany also entered the race for the development of cable networks late. There were many reasons for this, including its late start in developing a colonial empire, long after the main colonies were established by other powers. The maintenance of the links with colonies as an important motivating force for the development of a telegraph network did not exist. However, Germany was gaining strategic power very rapidly. With formidable scientific and technological developments, Germany achieved the critical mass needed to become a global player. In order to play the global game, however, Germany needed a global communication system.

As was the case with France, the main obstacle was British dominance in this field. After many failed attempts Germany managed to create its own transatlantic telegraphic link via the Azores. The cable like other German-owned telegraph cables was cut at the beginning of the First World War. This was an example of the strategic importance of telegraph cables. One of the reasons why Germany focussed on the development of wireless communication was the difficulty it had in competing with the British, already well developed, telegraph cable network. Like many cases in history, a disadvantage was turned into an advantage. Germany became a super-power in the development of radio technology.

The emergence of the United States as a global political and economic power could be traced via the extent of its share in the global cable network. This was particularly noticeable after World War I, when the USA started to play a proactive diplomatic role. At the Paris Peace Conference, President Wilson challenged national telecommunication monopolies by promoting free and open global communication. One of his objectives was to put an end to the British monopoly and open the telecommunication market for US companies. When it came to the Americas, the USA applied the Monroe Doctrine to telecommunications by extending its own network and reducing the cable networks of European powers.
Telegraphic dominance provided the British Foreign and Commonwealth Offices with an enormous advantage in forging international policy. Most global business and government communication had to pass through British-controlled cables. There are numerous historical examples when this advantage proved decisive. For example, the British ambassador to Paris heard the news about the defeat of the French fleet at Tonkin even before the French government to which the intercepted message was addressed. Besides being better informed, the British control of the telegraph started to become of even more direct military and strategic benefit.

One historical example of the impact of the control of communication on the outcome of a military conflict is the Fashoda crisis, involving French and British colonial ambitions in Africa. The French plan to control Africa from the west (Dakar) to the East (Djibouti) clashed in Fashoda with the British ambitions to establish North-South control over the continent from Cairo to Cape Town. The British victory in this crisis was determined to a large extent because the British commander (unlike his French counterpart) had a means of communicating via the telegraph with his headquarters. This resulted in two main developments. First, while London was fully informed, Paris did not have a clue about what was going on in Fashoda. Second, exploiting his communication monopoly, the British Commander Kitchener conveyed false information about the difficult position of the French troops in Fashoda. Paradoxically, in spite of France’s strong position on the ground in Fashoda, the outcome of the crisis was not favourable to French interests. The technological advantage was so strong that the French officials were forced to ask their British counterparts to send a message to Paris via the British telegraph.¹⁵

It is reported that the British used their communication advantage for commercial purposes as well. For example, the USA was concerned that information sent to the USA Board of Trade was also used by British firms.\(^{16}\)

The use of the telegraph gradually became a part of international life and a part of diplomatic tactics. In the section dealing with the tools for diplomatic activities, more details about the Ems and the Zimmerman telegrams will be presented. After the telegraph changed the historical link of “speed of transport = speed of communication,” other communication inventions followed on, as we will see in the next few pages.

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Cooperation between the main powers in laying cables had an important long-term aspect of preparing the “nervous system” of an emerging global regime. Political alliances were usually dictated by short-term considerations. For example, the French cable policy, in close cooperation with Germany, did not follow the Anglo-French Entente in 1904. The main interest of the French telegraph concern was to use cooperation with Germany in order to reduce British dominance in the field of telegraphy. Although the reason for such a move of the French telegraph authorities was strategic, some authors, such as Lesage, used it as an example of the lack of operational coordination in French foreign policy decision-making:

“The prolonged disagreement between the general principles of French diplomacy and the procedures of the telegraphic policies come, I believe, from the fact that in this country, each ministry has its own foreign policy: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has one, the Ministry of Finance has another…. The Postal and Telegraph Administration also has, from time to time, a foreign policy; as it so happened, these past few years, that, without being entirely hostile to England, it demonstrated a strong inclination for Germany.”

The telegraph appeared early on diplomatic agendas. In the mid-nineteenth century, after the telegraph was firmly established as the main telecommunications medium, exchanges occurred across international borders. The common station in Strasbourg, for communication between France and Baden, was an example of this early international telegraph exchange. The station consisted of “two employees, one from the French Telegraph Administration, the other from Baden. The French employee received, for example, a telegram from Paris, which the electric wires had transmitted to him with the speed of light. This message he wrote out by hand onto a special form and handled it across the table to his German colleague. He translated it into German, and sent it again on its way”. Such a system could not sustain the requirements for fast and direct communication. In order to overcome bottlenecks at international borders, countries started concluding bilateral telegraph agreements.

The most developed network of bilateral agreements was in Germany, at that time divided into many small states. The bilateral initiatives were intensive. In 1849, Prussia and Saxony concluded the first bilateral agreement, which was followed by others. Only one year later, the German states and Austria established the Austro-German Telegraph Union. Other European countries started concluding bilateral agreements too. This led towards the establishment of a regional organisation, the West European Telegraph Union, at the Berlin Convention of 1855.

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20 France-Belgium (1851), France-Switzerland (1852), France-Sardinia (1853).
The bilateral arrangements, combined with a few regional initiatives, could not keep pace with the intensity of technological developments. The need for a comprehensive multilateral arrangement was obvious. The first multilateral arrangement was adopted in 1865, in Paris, with the establishment of the International Telegraph Union. This was followed in 1868 with the establishment of the International Bureau of Telegraph Administration, in Bern, which is considered to be the first permanent international organisation. The International Telegraph Union introduced new forms of international regimes, which were followed by many international initiatives.

One of the main international legal issues, raised in 1865 at the Paris Conference, was the neutral status of sub-marine telegraphic cables. France, later joined by Germany and other states, requested the protection of sub-marine telegraphic cables in case of conflict. The main opponent was Great Britain since it both controlled most sub-marine cables and the technology for managing them (including cable-cutting tools), giving it a considerable strategic advantage. While subsequent international telegraph conferences established rules for the protection of cables from fishing trawlers and ships’ anchors, cables remained outside the regulations covering the conduct of war.

Since the very beginning, the International Telecommunication Union has experienced the problem of “multistakeholder diplomacy.” One problem involved the question of how to involve the UK and the USA, which did not have telegraph state monopolies. The main operators were private telegraph companies. This problem was considerable, given the fact that most international traffic and development went through the UK and the USA. Private companies were invited to participate, without the right to vote, at the International Telegraph Union Conference in Rome (1871-1872). Although the private sectors from the UK and the USA participated fully in establishing the subsequent structure of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the tension between state- and private-run telecommunication systems has remained ever since.

Many important political decisions, which influenced the future development of the telegraph, were adopted at the next diplomatic conference, held in St. Petersburg, in 1875. One of the most controversial issues was the control of the content of telegraph communication. While the conference participants from the USA and the UK promoted the principle of the privacy of telegraph correspondence, Russia and Germany insisted on limiting this privacy in order to protect state security, public order, and public morality. A compromise was reached through an age-old diplomatic technique, diplomatic ambiguity. While article 2 of the St. Petersburg convention guaranteed the privacy of telegraph communication, article 7 limited this privacy and introduced the possibility of state censorship. The United States, which did not participate, refused to sign the convention because of “the censorship article.”

After the First World War, at the Paris Peace Conference (1919), the question of telegraphy was firmly on the agenda. Following the overall diplomatic

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21 It is interesting to note that this balance between freedom of communication and public order continued to exist in many subsequent international instruments.
approach to the post-war settlement, President Wilson advocated the establishment of open and free communication on the global level. His main proposal was to render telecommunications a global public utility instead of a tool in a global power game. The US approach also aimed to challenge UK dominance in the field of cable-based communication. Apart from the general principles, the most contentious issue was what to do with the German and the Japanese cables. The US proposal to either return them to Germany or put them under collective Allied supervision was strongly opposed by the UK and France, which insisted that “the ex-German cables are prizes of war.” In the absence of an agreement, diplomatic postponement was the only option. The Washington Conferences (1920-1922) were organised in order to deal with this issue. The UK and France remained firm in their position. The only important concession offered to the USA was the right to land cables and operate radio and telegraph stations at the strategically important Yap post, which was in Japanese possession.

The introduction of new topics on diplomatic agendas influenced the organisation of diplomatic services and led to the emergence of new posts in diplomatic missions, such as military attaché as well as diplomats in charge of economic and cultural affairs.  

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The telegraph was initially, and subsequently principally, used in diplomacy for internal communication between diplomatic missions and headquarters. This also included communication on personal, ceremonial, and organisational matters.

One early example of the use of the telegram is the communication between the US Secretary of State in Washington and the US Ambassador in Paris, in November 1866. Immediately after the end of the Civil War, the US government began to press France to remove its troops, which had supported Mexico. US diplomacy decided to use the telegram in order to coordinate this urgent diplomatic manoeuvre. As so happened, the encrypted message that passed through British and French cables did not prove to have any diplomatic importance. It will go down in the history of diplomacy and technology as one of the most expensive misguided experiments. The cost of the dispatch of this telegram was $20,000. The total annual budget of the US State Department was $150,000. This huge bill triggered a court case between the State Department and the telegraph company. Eventually, after the decision of the Supreme Court, the US government was forced to pay for this expensive experiment in diplomatic innovation.

By the end of the nineteenth century the telegraph also started being used in day-to-day diplomatic activities. This invention triggered mixed reactions. The
British Ambassador to Venice, Sir Horace Rumbold, commented on the negative impact of the telegraph on the independence of diplomats in their function (“the telegraphic demoralisation of those who formerly had to act for themselves and are now content to be at the end of the wire”). The immediacy of communication introduced the possibility of tighter and more direct control of missions by headquarters. Diplomats also frequently complained about the lack of time for a proper and analytical approach to diplomatic activities. The following comment by the British Ambassador Edmond Hammond sounds as if it was made today: “to make every person in a hurry, and I do not know that with our business it is very desirable that it should be.” One French diplomat provides an interesting survey of the evolution of French diplomacy. In 1896, when he entered the diplomatic service: “Young recruits were taught the diplomatic style of handwriting, designed for maximum legibility.” At that time “he and his colleagues spent much of their time playing draughts.” The situation completely changed in 1913 after he returned from his post in Rome. “Work was much harder. Tea was taken, if at all, at one’s desk. Each office now had a telephone. Female typists and even female secretaries were now employed.”

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Besides internal communication for diplomatic services, the telegraph also started being used for inter-government communication, which had a more important impact on international relations. Increasingly, communication at the highest levels started being conducted via the telegraph. The telegraph also became a part of diplomatic tactics. I will mention three examples of telegrams, which had a considerable impact on the development of international relations and, to a certain extent, changed the course of history. The first example is the Ems Telegram. The second is the Zimmerman Telegram. The last example is related to the end of this period and the use of the telegraph during the July Crisis, immediately before the start of World War I.

The Ems Telegram is usually considered to be an example of the way in which “technology” could be used for achieving strategic and military objectives. Bismarck’s objective was to unify Germany. His first step was to start a war with France. How did a telegram help Bismarck to achieve this aim? This was a time of crisis in the relations between France and Prussia, caused by the fight for a successor to the Spanish throne. At one stage, the Prussian King, who was not very keen about starting a war with France, sent Bismarck a telegram from Ems in which he reported on his meeting with the French ambassador and asked Bismarck to inform the diplomatic corps and press. The telegram was not meant to be read by the French. It was sent to Bismarck, who was then supposed to draft an appropriate telegram to be sent to the French. Bismarck only removed a few lines from the original telegram and forwarded it to the French. It provoked a war and led to German unification in 1871. In answer to the counterfactual question: “What would have happened had the telegram not been sent?” one can speculate on quite a different turn of events. In a pre-telegraph world, Bismarck would have gone to see the King to discuss such an important issue as a reply to the French and ultimately received an unambiguous message that the king was reluctant to go to war.
The Zimmerman Telegram became a part of history because it influenced the USA to abandon its neutrality and to enter World War I in 1916. The telegram was sent by the German Foreign Minister to the German Ambassador in Mexico with the following instructions: “We make Mexico a proposal of alliance on the following basis: make war together, make peace together, generous financial support, and an understanding on our part that Mexico is to reconquer the lost territory in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona”.25 There are various theories surrounding this telegram. One is that it was intercepted by British intelligence and rewritten in such a way as to provoke a strong anti-neutrality sentiment in the United States. This ultimate goal was achieved. The USA entered the war.

25 Ibid, p. 94.
Stephen Kern has reconstructed the July Crisis (1914) in detail by analysing events day by day and hour by hour.\textsuperscript{26} He concludes: “This telegraphic exchange at the highest level dramatised the spectacular failure of diplomacy, to which telegraphy contributed with crossed messages, delays, sudden surprises, and unpredictable timing.”\textsuperscript{27} The major problem, which led to the pre-World War I failure of diplomacy, was diplomats’ inability to cope with the volume and speed of electronic communication. Diplomats “failed to understand the full impact of instantaneous communication without the ameliorating effect of delay.”\textsuperscript{28} The important rationale for the July Crisis example is that speed and immediacy do not necessarily provide positive results. On the contrary, there is a high likelihood that they could lead towards hasty and recklessly considered moves and miscommunications.

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., p. 268.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., p. 276.
The Need for Urgent Responses
The speed of transfer of the message has been linked to the urgency of the reply. If a message travels for months, one can afford the luxury of taking, if not months, at least weeks to prepare a proper response. This situation changed with the telegraph. The immediacy of the sending of messages required immediate responses from diplomats abroad. This affected the “timing” of diplomatic work and, potentially, led towards hasty, and sometimes not properly prepared, responses.

The Problem of Coordinating Communication
Urgency led towards the problem of coordinating communication. Very often, telegrams would arrive in the wrong order, creating considerable confusion with important consequences, as was the case prior to the First World War. During a delicate exchange on the Alabama dispute, the US Foreign Secretary, Granville, warned his counterpart, the British Prime Minister, Gladstone, of this risk: “This telegraphing work is despairing. It will be a mercy if we do not get into some confusion.”

The Need to Prepare Concise Messages – Reduce Context
The telegraph was an expensive medium, so the content of each telegram had to be carefully considered. Diplomats had to improve the quality of diplomatic reportage. They had to abandon long and descriptive memos and master the skill of concise and precise writing. This is one historical example of how technology influences style and etiquette.

The Emergence of Foreign Policy Bureaucracy
Although the first ministries of foreign affairs were established earlier, they started to proliferate at the end of the nineteenth century as a result of bureaucratic expansion. French diplomacy grew from 70 diplomats in 1814 to 170 diplomats one century later. The Habsburg Empire had 51 diplomats in the mid-nineteenth century and 146 at its end in 1918. The foreign ministry achieved the shape that it has more-or-less retained until today. It consisted mainly of geographical departments handling bilateral relations with various countries. Entrance exams gradually replaced family ties as the main...
recruitment method. New diplomats were trained in diplomatic academies. A sense of professionalism started to prevail.

The Centralisation of Diplomacy
Easier communication via the telegraph and well-equipped ministries led to a centralisation of diplomatic services. Previously independent diplomatic missions came under the control of their headquarters. Instructions could easily be sent via the telegraph. “Real power, the ability to determine the form and timing of diplomatic initiatives, has shifted towards the Foreign Office.”

1814-1914: Statesmen (from Leaders to Followers)
Statesmen and diplomats were essentially unprepared for the sudden appearance of this new technology, which overwhelmed them and contributed to the fact that, at a certain point in time, statesmen and diplomats ceased to be the creators of policies and became mere followers of events, sometimes even very clumsy followers of events, which were getting out of their control. Unprepared to handle the new technology, diplomats who used to meet and manage international peace through direct communication suddenly became involved in the frenetic world of “modern diplomacy,” conducted via telegraphs and telephones.
The Future?
To illustrate, here is one prediction of the future from the late nineteenth century: